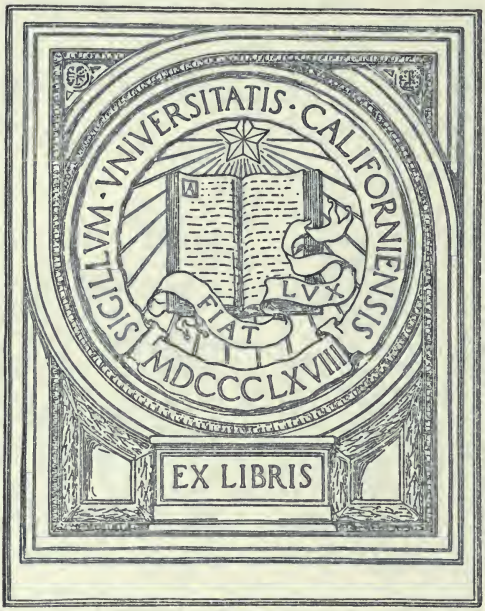
The MASQUE of DEATH

·CHARLES·LOTIN·HILDRETH·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THE MASQUE OF DEATH

AND OTHER POEMS.

A thread of song, a fragmentary strain,
  A few frail links of half familiar rhyme,
Throb on the night, then fall and die again,
  Leaving no echo in the lapse of time ;
But if some wayfarer should linger, fain
  To catch once more the interrupted chime,
Why, then, this music was not made in vain.

THE MASQUE OF DEATH

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

CHARLES LOTIN HILDRETH

AUTHOR OF

"JUDITH," "OO," "THE NEW SYMPHONY," ETC.

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PREFACE.

It is with a regretful sense of a broken flight, a race half run, a song silenced in the midst, that I look upon these my collected verses, wrought, for the most part, in the brief and infrequent intervals of uncongenial and imperative labors. I feel that they constantly bear the impress of the weariness and depression which they were intended, in some measure at least, to relieve. This is not said by way of excuse for their shortcomings, which I perceive, perhaps more clearly than another can. To offer one's productions to criticism, and then deprecate it, is an affectation which I shall not be guilty of. But I shall be grateful if, with the perception of their faults, shall be united some appreciation of the endeavor which called them into being. *That*, I know, has a value and a worth of its own. If it win for me some degree of kindly recognition among thoughtful readers, my hopes will be more than fulfilled.

New York, *December, 1888.*

Such a preface disarms criticism

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THE MASQUE OF DEATH,

AND OTHER POEMS.

THE MASQUE OF DEATH.

A FUNERAL passed me in the street to-day—
A dolorous procession moving slow
With all the grim respectable display
Which makes a hideous mockery of woe.

Ah, but 'twas brave! A spectacle so fine
Might almost tempt an humble wight to die,
For once in proud pre-eminence to shine
Chief actor in a grisly tragedy.

In truth I turned away in sick disgust
With all the proud parade of plume and pall,
And some small pity for the senseless dust
Consigned to earth with ghastly festival.

The savage past still clings to us, we deem
It sacred duty to display our woe
In ostentatious mummery, and dream
The dead are honored by the dreadful show.

The grave is very humble, and the pride
That fools us here the dead have all forgot;
The king and slave lie calmly side by side,
Each well contented with his lowly lot.

Impartial earth receives into her breast
The varied brood she bears, the great and small,
High-thoughted man and stolid brute, the best
And worst unfavored, for she loves them all.

But man, too conscious of himself, resents
The pure democracy of Nature's plan,
And rears above his bones brief monuments
To bear the empty tale: Here lies a Man!

Years wear serenely on, another age
Treads laughing on the sorrows of the last,
Time wears the letters from the granite page,
And weeds grow on the memories of the past.

And rightly viewed, it is a gracious doom ;
The dead and their traditions pass away
To give new life, new thought, new beauty room,
A higher law of being to obey.

GHOSTS.

Twelve by the chime : from idle dreams awaking,
I trim my lamp and mount the creaking stair ;
The shadows through the carven arches shaking
Seem mocking phantoms that pursue me there.

The faded portraits in the lamp-light's glamour
Look down with cold inquisitorial gaze ;
The sculptured busts, the knights in rusted armor,
Loom large against the window's pictured maze.

Thick dust falls from the time-worn, tattered hangings,
Thick dust lies on the tessellated floor ;
My step sounds loud, the door's sepulchral clangings
Roll far along the gusty corridor.

Ah me ! amid my dwelling's desolation
It seems some fable that my brain recalls,
That once a glad and gallant generation
Loved, laughed, and feasted in these lonely halls.

Silent the voice of song, and hushed the laughter,
Cheerless and cold the empty banquet-room;
The spider weaves in gilded groin and rafter,
The shrill wind whistles through the vaulted gloom.

Vanished those dear ones, by what hidden highways,
In what far regions, o'er what stormy waves,
I know not, nor in what oblivious byways
The sere grass sighs above their nameless graves.

And yet, as if my soul's imperious longing
Were as a spell unspoken yet supreme,
Pale shapes seem through the hollow darkness thronging,
Like those wan visitants which haunt a dream.

They gather round me through the silent spaces,
Like clouds across the waning twilight blown,
Till all the room is filled with flickering faces
And hovering hands that reach to wring my own.

With friendly greeting and familiar gesture,
Wearing the form and feature that they wore
When youth and beauty clothed them like a vesture,
They come, the unforgotten ones of yore.

On cheek and brow I feel their chill caresses,
Like cold, faint airs of autumns long ago ;
I hear the sighing of their ghostly tresses,
The trailing of their garments to and fro.

Up from the gulfs of time, the blind abysses,
Those radiant phantoms of the past arise,
And bring again the perfume of their kisses,
The peril and the splendor of their eyes.

But cold their lips, they breathe no warm affection,
And cold their breasts as frozen shapes of snow ;
Their luminous eyes are but a vague reflection;
Stray starbeams in the ice-bound stream below.

'Tis well : nay, if by spell or incantation
The loved and lost I might again behold,
Breathing and warm in youth's bright incarnation,
And glowing with the loveliness of old.—

That word I would withhold, for their sakes only :
Estranged and changed as in a haggard dream,
Time-tossed and tempest-beaten, old and lonely,
To their young eyes what spectres we should seem !

LOVE.

Love was primeval ; from forgotten time
Come hints of common lives by love made great,
In pastoral song or fragmentary rhyme,
While fades the fame of many a warlike state.
Love lives forever, though we pass away ;
Still shall there be hot hearts and longing eyes,
Hyperion youths and maids more fair than they,
Loath lips and lingering hands and parting sighs,
When we have vanished and our simple doom
Is blended with the themes of old romance.
Ay, from our dust young buds and flowers shall bloom,
To deck bright tresses in the spring-tide dance
And be the mute, sweet signs of love confessed
To passioned hopes upon a maiden's breast.

TO AN OBSCURE POET WHO LIVES ON MY HEARTH.

Why shouldst thou cease thy plaintive song
When I draw near?
Has mankind done thee any wrong,
That thou shouldst fear?

To see thee scampering to thy den,
So wild and shy,
'Twould seem thou knowst the ways of men
As well as I.

'Tis true the palmy days are o'er
When all thy kind—
Poor minstrel folk—at every door
Might welcome find;

For song was certain password then
To every breast,
And current coin that bought from men
Food, fire, and rest;

And these are more discerning days,
More coldly just;
I doubt thy rustic virelays
Would earn a crust.

The age is shrill and choral-like.
For many sing;
And he who would be heard must strike
Life's loudest string.

And thou, poor minstrel of the field
With slender tone,
Art type of many a singer sealed
To die unknown.

And many a heart that would have sung
Songs sweet to hear,
Could passion give itself a tongue
To catch the ear.

But, cricket, thou shouldst trust in me,
For thou and I
Are brothers in adversity—
Both poor and shy.

And since the height of thy desire
Is but to live,
Thy little share of food and fire
I freely give.

And thou shalt sing of fields and hills
And forest streams,
Till thy rapt invocation stills
My troubled dreams.

JOY.

Like some winged flake of evening mist
The spell-dispensing moon has kissed
With lucid beauty and ethereal fire,
Thou wearest shapes like those we most adore ;
But thou can'st fill the arms of our desire
O never more !

Thou tempt'st us with Love's burning eyes,
Or in Ambition's warrior guise
Point'st with thy naked sword the upward way,
Thrilling and madding us to our heart's core ;
When we are worn and old and cold, thou'lt stay
O never more !

Thou art the all-in-all of youth,
The semblance of a splendid truth ;
Defeated age seeks thy calm sister Peace,
And sits in numbed content beside her door ;
Thy siren songs can rouse its opiate ease
O never more !

TIME.

A DARK, tumultuous sea, whose hither shore
Is strewn with wreck of those who sailed before,
To seek the golden lands and happy isles,
  In sunny calms below the curving sky.
Bidding adieu with waving hands and smiles,
  They sailed away, and here their relics lie—
A silken sail, a spar, a splintered oar,
  A withered wreath, soaked in the salt sea spray,
  A carven verse or name, half worn away—
    And nothing more.

THE OWL.

THERE is no flame of sunset on the hill,
  There is no flush of twilight in the plain ;
The day is dead, the wind is weird and shrill ;
  Amid the gloom the sheeted shapes of rain
Glide to and fro with stealthy feet and still,
  And wilder than the wood's autumnal moan
  A voice wails through the night, "Alone, Alone!"

No bird dips down a moment in its flight
  To fill the silence full of sudden song ;
The immemorial music of the night,
  When stars are few and twilight lingers long,
Is hushed ; with lone, sharp sound of wintry blight,
  The cricket quavers near the sheltered stone—
  And hark! the haunting cry, "Alone, Alone!"

Wan mists on level marsh and meadow rise,
  Like spectral lakes along whose cloudy gleams
Dark boats are driven, unseen of mortal eyes,

Towards some dim coast, some island-vale of dreams;
While on this desolate shore some watcher cries
To friends afar in the remote unknown,
Lamenting through the gloom, "Alone, alone!"

The boughs are shaken in the bitter sky
With hollow sound of trouble and amaze;
And faster in the dusk the dead leaves fly,
Like pallid ghosts pursued through lonely ways;
Darkly I watch them as they shudder by,
While yet again in mournful monotone
The voice repeats my thought, "Alone, alone!"

Night deepens on the haggard close of day
With wilder clamor of the wind and rain;
Louder the beaten branches groan and sway;
And fitfully the voice comes once again,
Across the fields, more faint and far away—
Is it the dark bird's wailing backward blown,
Or my own heart that cries, "Alone, alone!"?

THE CHIMES.

The night is stirred with liquid murmurings,
That ripple softly through the silent hour,
As in a placid pool the dimpled rings
Curve round the broken petals of a flower.

From the gray steeple pointing to the stars,
Dim in the darkling cluster of old trees,
The golden notes pour through the belfry bars
And fill the air with choral harmonies.

Over the moonlit hills they come and go ;
Over the misty fields they melt and die ;
Over the glimmering river, sweet and low,
Floating and failing on the night-wind's sigh ;

Re-moaning through the arches of the wood,
Like the last breathings of the organ's tone,
When in an old cathedral's solitude
A pilgrim lingers there to pray alone;

Mingling faint echoes with the bubbling fall
  Of waters in deep glens and lonely dells,
As at the close of some bright festival
  Soft strains of music blend with low farewells ;

Whispering sweet dreams in many a sleeper's ear—
  Incarnate memories of other years ;
Speaking with voices he no more shall hear,
  So that he starts and wakes in happy tears.

THE WOOD THRUSH.

In that soft twilight change of summer eves
From rosy bloom to darkness cool and still,
Sweet from some dusky haunt among the leaves
Thy voice is heard by lonely field or hill,
Chanting thy low, impassioned vesper hymn,
Clear as the silver treble of a stream
Round mossy isles in woodland valleys dim.
There have I hearkened, as one in a dream
Lies smiling, while some dear form bent above
Taps at the muffled portals of the brain
With gentle touch and murmured words of love
Until the heart stirs with a tender pain ;
While the wrapt senses soothed in slumbrous balm
Sink down still deeper in delicious calm.

MIDNIGHT.

Far heard, and faintly, over wood and hill,
  Twelve slow vibrations from the village chime
Ruffle the gracious calm. Oh, rare the skill
  That gave so sweet a voice to iron time!

The airs are gentle as the breath of sleep;
  They are no more than wingèd souls of flowers,
Lured forth by night from hedgy coverts deep,
  Where drowsily they shunned the glaring hours.

The moon is up. Now this were time to see
  All delicate shy things that haunt the wood:
The mild-eyed fauns, the nymphs of stream and tree,
  King Oberon and all his fairy brood.

Now from the folded curtain of each flower
  Small visages should peer upon the moon,
To note if it be yet the charmèd hour
  To trace the ring and chaunt the magic rune.

What low, delicious sound was that far borne
From the obscure recesses of the glen?
Was it the fanfare of an elfin horn,
Or restless bird that trilled and slept again?

Is that the brook's bland gurgle in the sedge,
Or flag-wreathed naiads by the osiered stream,
Dabbling their white limbs from the oozy edge,
Or diving where the minnows dart and gleam?

There is a rustle in the thicket screen!
Is it a frightened hare that starts and flies,
Or stealthy-footed faun that peers between
The interwoven vines with shy surmise?

'Twere hardly a surprise if from the shades
Pan came, and, marshalling his merry crew,
Piped to their dancing in the moonlit glades,
Timing with horny hoof and wild halloo.

O for the fervor of a Doric prayer,
A Runic spell, or secret Druid rite,
To call the forest-haunters from their lair
And charm the elfin companies to sight!

For Pan sits in some beechen coppice near,
  Throned on the turf amongst his bearded brood ;
Piping in undertones we may not hear,
  Or, hearing, deem them voices of the wood.

The fauns lurk in their ivied dens unseen,
  The naiads cower near the reeded rill ;
The viewless fairies dance upon the green,
  The oreads slumber on the russet hill.

THE TRYST.

Sweet as the change from pleasant thoughts to sleep
  The silver gloaming melted into gloom,
Then came the evening silence rich and deep,
  With mingled breaths of dew-released perfume ;
The few, first stars shone in the azure pale,
Soft as a young nun's glances through her veil.

Was it for darkness that thou waited, sweet?
  Ah, though thy face was dusk in night's eclipse,
Thy heart betrayed thee by its quickened beat!
  I needed not the light to find thy lips,
Nor in the balmy hush of even time,
To hear one word more sweet than any rhyme.

SEA-FANCIES.

THERE is no cloud upon the limpid sky,
No blur of vapor on the sea beneath;
The clear pools on the rock unwrinkled lie,
And, only stirred as by an infant's breath,
The salt grass rustles faint and fitfully.
No muffled landward echoes, borne afar,
Thrill through the moon-suffused tranquillity;
But where the breakers glimmer on the bar
A long, low murmur, like a summer rain,
Grows deep and organ-toned, then fails again.

The low moon's level wake across the waves
Leaps into splendor where they fall and rise
In silver-breasted hillocks, shadow-caves
And undulating whirls, that cheat the eyes
To fancies of strange monsters, and fair shapes
Of nereids and mermaids, crowned with shells
And soft sea-blooms from Southern coves and capes, —
Lifting their dripping bosoms from the swells
To gaze upon the moonlit world awhile
And beckon us with many a nod and smile.

And there are voices from the sea-chafed rocks,
In slippery clefts and hollows water-worn,
Where pulpy algæ trail their slimy locks,—
Strange liquid tones, as of a Triton's horn,
Blown gurgling through green shallows, clear and low,
Soft laughter, and the plash of curvéd palms :
Round lonely isles and inlets, long ago,
The fisher heard such sounds through twilight calms
And, coasting homeward, with hushed utterance told
Of siren music sung to harps of gold.

THE SPIRIT OF POETRY.

She move to measures of ethereal song
Along the starry corridors of heaven;
Her tresses float the moon's white beams among,
And on the golden mists of dawn are driven.

Through woodland ways, o'er lake and stream, she glides,
On mountain-peak, in dim, mysterious dell;
She rocks in sea-shell boat on tropic tides,
Or sleeps within some field-born floweret's bell.

Her voice is heard in Autumn's gusty sigh,
When Summer's tender folk are perishing;
She shouts afar with Winter's boisterous cry,
And hails with earliest birds the birth of Spring.

In some white-pillared temple of the past
She sits with hero shades of deathless name,
With solemn eye and brow of tragic cast,
Refines the blood-stains from the book of Fame.

Or in the East, with feudal clang and sheen,
Where Murder bears the cross for Jesus' sake,
She rolls a purple mist before the scene
And bids phantasmal shapes of splendor wake.

She consecrates the blood in battle shed,
If tyrants fall or Liberty arise;
She flings a pall of glory o'er the dead,
Streaked with the crimson of her sunset skies.

She comes to us in hours of bleakest care,
Unseen till time has wiped away our tears;
Then trace we her benignant presence there
In memory, sadly sweeter through the years.

Deep-veiled she stands with Grief beside the tomb;
Yet, when the first wild agony has fled,
She sheds a hallowed radiance through the gloom,
And makes all-perfect the imperfect dead.

Hers is the holy influence of home,—
The love that lingers latest in the breast,—
Whatever hopes may fail, or sorrows come,
The heart's one friend, the calmest, surest, best.

From wilful childhood, pattering through the rain
To seek the sun-bow's root behind the hill,
To manhood's sterner strivings, not less vain,
The charm is hers that gilds ambition still.

She looks upon us through Love's lucid eyes,
And well for him who knows and holds her fast;
For him life's perfect purpose never dies,
And loveliness and love are never past.

Lost child of Heaven, she wanders everywhere,
And where she goes transforms the sordid Real,
Or bursts the bonds of beauty hiding there;
And moulds of basest clay the pure Ideal.

HE NEEDS NO TEARS.

I.

Tears for the unrequited dead.
Tears for the hapless whom the sun
Of fortune never shone upon ;
Tears for the weary feet that bled
Unseen along life's thorniest ways ;
For him whose labors earned no praise ;
For him who garnered fruitless years ;
Whose lowly love to man was given,
And gained no smile from man or heaven ;
For these be tears.

II.

But he whose loftier destiny
Marked him among the throng of men
For fortune's highest honors, then
Ere time had tarnished them, to die
And leave to history a name
Unspotted, and a martyr's fame ;
Who in the vigor of his years
Climbed rugged Glory's final steep
There made his bed and fell asleep ;
He needs no tears.

AMBITION.

Fly on thou radiant phantasy!
Fly on! but I will follow thee
No more swift-shod with hope to make thee mine;
Thou hast outsped my strength; the chase is o'er
And my tired steps will press the dust of thine
No more, oh, nevermore!

Weave thy bright tresses with the wind,
Turn thy shy face and look behind;
Purse up thy ruddy mouth and stretch thine arms
As if thou wouldst my close embrace implore!
But I will pant to clasp thy phantom charms
No more, oh, nevermore!

THE PROPHECY.

Those who have looked upon the dead have seen
A faint prophetic glory in the face,
As if a light were breaking, warm, serene,
Upon their vision in some unknown place.

So now upon the ashen clouds there came
A delicate suffusion, deepening slow,
Till through a silver rift a tender flame
Poured a pale radiance on the crusted snow.

And far o'er many a bleak and haggard mile
Of drifted glen and desolate white plain,
The splendor hovered, like a tranquil smile
On wan lips rigid with their last cold pain.

It was a revelation : the keen air
Seemed misted with a rain of luminous gold,
And in the hazel copse and hedge-rows bare
I looked to see the first green buds unfold.

And suddenly the mute midwinter gloom
  Seemed musical with insect-murmuring,
And phantom odors of the cherry-bloom
  Woke in my heart the ecstasy of spring.

The glory passed ; again on field and hill
  Relentless winter frowned in darkest mood,
And through the ice-bound valleys, rising shrill,
  The wind wrung bitter moanings from the wood.

But I had caught the gracious prophecy
  Of April hasting from her southern bowers,
And felt beneath the melancholy sky
  The tender benediction of the flowers.

CHIME-PICTURES.

What voice as of the tempest-trampled sea,
  What turbulence of terror and delight,
What organ-peal, what solemn litany
  Clamors along the quiet aisles of night?

What tocsin's moan through midnight silence falls,
  What clash of arms, what hurrying to and fro,
While grimly serried on the fortress-walls,
  The spearmen lean to watch the coming foe?

What is this wonder of a thousand eyes
  That flashes far along the ancient street,
What throng is this that waits with mute surmise,
  What clang of drums, what tread of marching feet?

What banners blaze from roof and balcony,
  What scarfs from snowy shoulders glimmer down,
While — hark! the rending shout reels to the sky:
  "It is the king who comes to claim his own!"

What chorus hymeneal in dim shades
Of aged oaks without the city's gate,
Where wreathed in May-tide flowers, the blooming maids
Lead up the loath young bride in blushing state?

What stir of wind wing-laden with perfume,
What low sweet laugh of slow-descending streams,
While curfew bells, far-floating through the gloom,
Pervade the night with peace and pleasant dreams?

It is the Chime—the graybeard on the tower—
Who dreams aloud of dead and buried things:
Of vanished glory and departed power,
And love that lived in long forgotten springs.

And like the flicker fanned in dying embers,
Old forms and faces gather round him fast;
His heart grows young again as he remembers,
Rhyme after rhyme, the poem of the past.

But soon his memory fails, his voice is gone,
His chant expires in hollow moans of pain;
He stares around and finds himself alone,
And sadly lays him down to sleep again.

CLEARING WEATHER.

Back where their parent storm sits on the sea,
The broken clouds fly fast;
Rolled up like some defeated enemy
That over shoulder glances threateningly,
Contending to the last.

The sullen monotone of falling rain
And restless wind is done;
The drops are dry upon the window pane,
And on the village spire the glistening vane
Points toward the setting sun.

Between the columns of the woodland glows
The glory of the west;
Parterres of flower clouds, whence night bestows
A maiden-knot of jessamine and rose
To deck the young moon's breast.

MOONRISE.

I.

All unawares the early stars turn pale;
Across their faces, like a gauzy veil,
A fleecy lustre hangs—a hint of light,
Disclosing slowly on the rim of night.
A single cloud, a wanderer in the sky,
Strayed from some tempest squadron wheeling by,
Sleeps in the lucent arc with snowy crest,
And chasms of amber flame within its breast.

II.

Hark, the awaking stir! the light winds pass
In bended lanes across the ripened grass;
The bats like blots of dusker shadow fly,
With sudden wheel and feeble, snappish cry.
Night beetles labor by on crackling wing;
The unctuous toad leaps up with velvet spring;
The owl's half human cry sounds far away,
And near, the restless farm-dog's pompous bay.
Now on each tallest tree and bare hill's brow
There clings and downward creeps, an ashen glow—

Then like a sudden burst of melody,
Preluding some majestic symphony,
The full-sphered moon arises, red and large,
Through mists that curtain the horizon's marge.

III.

Anon it whitens in the purer field
Like some antique, new-polished silver shield,
Blurred with the dints and bruises of old wars.
Awhile forget the lore of those dim scars,
And take for truth the poet-sage's dream
Of tranquil seas, whose azure bosoms gleam,
Forever mirroring unclouded skies ;
Of fragrant plains where summer never dies ;
Rock grottoes, roofed with pearl and emerald ;
Cool, winding ways, moss-carpeted, green walled
With interwoven shrubs and clustered flowers—
Fresh, amaranthine, fairer-hued than ours :
Faint crooning groves that breathe a spicy balm,
And slumbrous vales, the haunts of trancèd calm.

IV.

Alas ! 'twas but the vision of a seer,
Who drew from shapes upon yon cloudy sphere
The parable of longing and unrest
Of every time and every human breast;

And though the lovely myth has winged afar
To sightless realms beyond the palest star,
The old faith lives, that somewhere there must be
Ideal beauty and serenity.

NATURE.

As dwellers near the border of the ocean
  Hear unaware its hoarse, habitual strife,
The waves of mighty and eternal motion
  Thunder upon the citied shores of life
With strenuous and pervading sound, which seems
  A silence to the tense, accustomed ear ;
Till, like awaking from tumultuous dreams
  To gentle morning airs and sunlight clear,
We stand upon some lone, majestic height,
  Full in the splendor of deep, smiling skies,
Zoned in pure calm and pinnacled in light,
  Mute with a reverent love and awed surprise.

HISTORY.

The hearts that beat a hundred years ago
Were players in a mighty symphony;
Each heard its separate part, no more; while we,
Who hear the solemn measures swell and flow,
Combined in one majestic hymn, bestow
Upon the whole the name of History.

MITHRA.

What comes with sound of stately trumpets pealing,
With flash of torches, flaring out the stars?
What majesty, what splendor slow revealing,
What mystery through the night's unfolding bars,
In gloom, cloud-multiform, delaying long,
Bursts into flower of flame and shower of song?

What march of multitudes in rhythmic motion,
What thunder of innumerable feet,
What mighty diapasons like the ocean,
Reverberating turbulently sweet
Through far dissolving silences, are blown
Worldward upon the wind's low monotone?

The mountains hear the warning and awaken,
In hushed processional issuing from the night,
Like Druid priests with mystic white robes shaken,
Communing in some immemorial rite:
Round their old brows burns what pale augury,
What benison, what ancient prophecy?

The sea has heard; through all its caverns under
Whither its giant broods have fled dismayed,
There goes a voice of wailing and of wonder:
"He comes, with gleaming spears and ranks arrayed,
And clang of chariot-wheels, and fire of spray:
We hear, we fear, we tremble and obey."

The earth has heard it, and, arising, breathless,
Sets wide her doors and leans with beckoning palms
Over the quickening east: "Resistless, deathless
Father of worlds and lord of storms and calms,
Thou at whose will the seasons bloom and fail,
Dispenser and destroyer, hail, all hail!"

What are these prophecies and preludes golden,
Legends of light, and clarions that blow?
What is this secret of the skies, long holden
In star-girt solitudes, disclosing now?
'Tis manifest—'tis here; the doubt is done:
The day-heart leaps and throbs—behold the sun!

SONG—THE VIGIL.

O Love, why wilt thou banish me so soon?
See, yonder floats the crescent moon,
A shining boat becalmed on azure seas
Among the twinkling Pleiades;
And not one star has quenched its crystal lamp
In haggard daybreak's dew and damp.

No spectral glimmer streaks the eastern skies,
Night lingers still; look up, dear eyes,
Faint beacons lit for love, thy tender shine
Betrays thee to no gaze but mine:
And none can hear lips meeting in a kiss
So hushed, my sweet, as this—and this!

Why tremble so? In slumber fathoms deep
They lie who bid us part and weep,
Dreaming their sleek white dove in perfumed nest
Sleeps safe in unregretful rest.
Let them dream on deluded, while we wake
The long night through for love's sweet sake.

THE HOUR.

I.

I AM the daughter of the buried past,
The destined mother of the years to come;
On all that was I close the portals fast,
And all that is to be lies in my womb.
I come from those dark realms which lie before—
Time's lightless wastes, where thought itself is blind;
I go to that pale coast called Nevermore,
Where dwell the shades of my departed kind—
Dim melancholy shapes that backward glance,
And weep and linger, turning at no call;
Or bright forms fading in harmonious dance,
With tender parting smiles more sad than all.

II.

I speed to earth along the sun's slant beam,
Among the shimmering motes that hover there,
On wings so still and silken, that they deem
Me, like themselves, an aimless child of air.
They are the glittering sparkles of decay
From earth's unstable crust, its towns and towers,
And from the bones of men that mould away,
Struck by the swift heel of the passing Hours :—

The cloven crowns of kings whose baleful frown
  Through crouching nations shot the bolt of death;
The piled-up pride of centuries, toppled down
  And ground to wreck impalpable beneath
The desolating tread of my strong race.
  Would ye behold Troy, Carthage, Babylon?
The sullen waste imparts no more their place;
  Their nameless dust is dancing in the sun.
And I, the youngest, too, shall claim my share;
  Build high, build strong! cement with blood and tears!
And I will come and people the thin air
  With such winged relics of the toil of years.

III.

My face is veiled, and while I live no eye
  Beholds my brow or guesses at my mien;
But when, transfixed by Time, I fall and die,
  The Hour that is to be shall lift the screen.
Then shall be known if I was foul or fair—
  If peace sat on my silent lips, or pain,
Or such rare loveliness that ye would dare—
  If I could hear—to call me back again.
Look well in my still lineaments and say
  Was I a loving friend or ruthless foe?
Were my caresses sweet? did I betray?
  Accuse me or lament, I shall not know.

IMPLORA PACE.

IN THE CEMETERY OF CERTOSA.

I stood within the cypress gloom
Where old Ferrara's dead are laid,
And mused on many a sculptured tomb,
Moss-grown and mouldering in the shade.

And there was one the eye might pass,
And careless foot might tread upon
A crumbling tablet in the grass,
With weeds and wild vines overrun.

In the dim light I stooped to trace
The lines the time-worn marble bore,
Of reverent praise or prayer for grace—
"*Implora Pace!*"—nothing more.

Name, fame and rank, if any were,
Had long since vanished from the stone,
Leaving the meek, pathetic prayer,
"Peace I implore!" and this alone.

EVENING.

I FEEL the cool breath of the coming night,
  Sweet with the scent of meadows and new hay,
And subtly as a failing of the sight
  The dusk invisibly dissolves the day.
Still in the west an arc of primrose light
  Crowns like an aureole the mountain's brow,
Flecked with thin sprays of palest red and gold,
  And through its lambent heart is piercing now
The point of one large star, keen, still and cold.

The east lies in the arms of night; the eye
  No longer marks the lines of hedge and lane,
The russet stacks and squares of husbandry,
  The shaven stubble and the furrowed plain;
But over all a clear obscurity—
  A pearly gloom lit from the lucid skies—
Hangs like a tenuous veil, through which is seen
  A world transformed to unfamiliar guise
Of darkling loveliness, cool, dim, serene.

SONG—REGRET.

THERE was a time when I was not ;
  There comes a time I shall not be ;
    This conscious dust, its joys and tears,
    Its fragile hopes and foolish fears,
Shall pass away and be forgot—
      Ah, even by thee !

The spring blooms on the ruined year,
  The old is buried in the new ;
    And who remembers last year's flowers,
    Its pleasant skies and sunny hours,
Or gives the vanished past a tear ?
      Alas ! how few !

'Tis well. What nature does is best ;
  'Tis well for us we can forget,
    And after sorrow smile again ;
    Else life were but an endless pain,
And memory one bitter quest,
      One long regret.

THE LOTUS FLOWER.

Oh, in what lonely valley, dimly seen
Through dusky aisles of immemorial trees,
Or on what lovely island, couched serene
In azure zones of unfrequented seas,
Blossoms the Lotus, fabled flower of ease?

For none have found it in the city street,
Among the wicked weeds that rankle there,
The matted sins that snare unwary feet,
The poison growth of slander, shame and care,
The hemlock leaves of anguish and despair.

Even in the fair, benignant face of heaven,
On sunny plain or solitary hill,
At noon or night, some drop of bitter leaven,
Some sinister surmise, some haunting ill,
Taints the clear cup of nature's quiet still.

It is not bought with wealth, nor bribed by power ;
The golden garnerings of insatiate gain
Win not its balm for one oblivious hour ;
And stricken kings 'neath canopies of pain,
Clasp burning palms and pray for it in vain.

And oh ! not in love's stormy realm it grows--
Love, whose inviolable trust denies
To aching hearts and watching eyes repose ;
Love that is sorrow in divine disguise,
Whose mission and reward are sacrifice.

Sweeter than love, or hope, or fame's false charm,
Honors, or gold, or fortune's vain caprice !
No brow has worn the coronal of calm,
No toil-worn slave of time has earned release
This side the grave ; the dead alone find peace.

ROMANCE.

Romance, twin-child with Beauty, shall not die
  While yet To-morrow smiles across To-night,
Or yet in sea, or land, or farthest sky,
  One secret place lies hidden from the sight.

The new-born child that wonders at the moon
  Floats into being on a sea of dreams ;
And through phantasmal dawn to broad, bright noon,
  The distant Eldorado glows and gleams.

The withered Past has left its flower behind ;
  Though time has swept the feudal world away,
Knights-errant, dreamers still, we ride to find
  Our princess and our golden lands to-day.

THE AWAKENING.

A SPIRIT from the south through drifted glens
And o'er the naked woods and wilds has flown ;
Slipped from their leashes in the mountain-dens,
With deep and hollow voice, the streams rush down,
Searching the level fields and sunken fens,
And round soft, sodden banks and hillocks bare,
Whirling in turbid circles everywhere.

The spongy soil sinks weltering to the foot,
And still thin, dusky streaks of crusted snow
In cold shades linger on the hemlock's root ;
But all the open lawns and meadows glow
With faint warm flame of many a tender shoot ;
The hazel stems are bright with burnished green,
And russet-hooded buds spring up between.

The plains are full of mingled mist and light ;
Cloud-shadows cross the hills with sudden showers ;
The dawn in frosty calm breaks cold and white,
Ripening to golden bloom at noonday hours ;
Shrill winds and winter flurries blur the night,
And in the glimpses of the rifted skies
The young moon's slender crescent gleams and dies.

SONG—WHILE LOVE IS NEW.

Sweet sound love's vows in lovers' ears
While love is new ;
But how if love, through trials and tears
And wiser thoughts of graver years,
Grow wiser, too ?

Dear are love's smiles to lovers' eyes
While love is new ;
But how when smiles are changed to sighs,
And eyes grow dim and beauty dies,
Will love die, too ?

Ah ! better then that love were slain
While it is new ;
Faith were but folly, hope a bane
And youth a dream and manhood vain,
If love die, too.

THE BURDEN OF TIME.

In cloudy legends of the dawn of years,
Or sculptured verse on shard or shattered stone,
The oldest lore is still of love and tears,
Of wild dark wars and cities overthrown,
And blows and bitter deeds and mad defeat,
Whereof the burden is, "Yet love is sweet."

And from all ways, where men have dwelt and died,
From nations dwindled to a minstrel's song,
A sound of voices, mingled, multiplied,
A rumor of delight, despair and wrong,
Of sorrows infinite and strange amaze,
Waft down the troubled winds of many days.

Crying: "We were love's votaries of old;
Though dust, our immemorial names remain
Embalmed in tales a thousand times retold,
That beat like echoes in the heart and brain,

Of stately strains through whose exultant flow
Breathe parting sighs, vain longings, utter woe."

Crying: "Ten years against the city's walls
The brazen waves of battle beat in vain,
And many a widow wailed in Dardan halls,
And many a Greek lay cold along the plain,
Till hapless Troy expired in blood and flame
And grew a word for Helen's love and shame."

Crying: "I am Leander, whom the sea
Spared to young Hero's arms a little space,
Then seized and smote the life out suddenly,
One black and bitter night, before her face;
But we had loved, nor gods nor mortals may
Efface the perfect past—we had our day;"

Crying: "The proud, sweet mouth and subtle smile,
The varying mood, the dusk, low-lidded gaze,
Stayed my war-wandering steps beside the Nile;
There, hand in hand, down love's delicious ways,
We walked to death, foreseeing, unafraid,
And passed from dreams to darkness, well repaid.'

But these are intimations faint with time ;
Hark, how from hearts that tremble and aspire,
Albeit unknown in any poet's rhyme,
The passion-song leaps up like living fire !—
"Travail and tears, wan brows and wounded feet,
These are love's sure award—yet love is sweet."

SONG.

Could I love thee so well and thou not love me, sweet?
Though lips be silent, eyes speak volumes when they meet;
I know not what mine eyes betrayed to thee, but I
Cried with my soul's voice—"Thou must love me or I die!"

I held thy hand; its pulses seemed to beat soft time
To some mysterious measure of delicious rhyme;
I know not what my touch confessed to thee, but I
Cried with my soul's voice—"Thou must love me or I die!"

I spake thy name—word sweeter ne'er was said or sung—
And lo! it seemed that all the evening silence rung
With voices echoing "Love!" and "Love!" again; but I
Cried with my soul's voice—"Thou must love me or I die!"

The stars shone faintly in the windows of the night,
And I was but a shadow's shadow in thy sight;
But there thou heard and answered, "I am thine," while I
Cried with my soul's voice---"Thou must love me or I die!"

THE KING AND THE POET.*

The people bowed before his throne ;
No eye dared look upon his face ;
His splendid cohorts round him shone,
And satraps of a royal race.

His heart beat high ; he bade them raise
A mighty, monumental stone,
Whereby his name and power and praise
To future ages should be known.

That self-same hour a poet lay
Musing beside a forest stream ;
Before his door at close of day
He told the shepherd folk his dream.

The stone is dust : the monarch's name
By men has been forgotten long ;
But the unconscious poet's fame
Is fresh as his immortal song.

* "This battered shaft, evidently a monolith commemorating some great victory, is all that remains to attest the power and glory of the sovereign of forty millions of people. We do not even know his name."—Notes on the Cuneiform Inscriptions.

WINTER—A LAMENT.

O SAD-VOICED winds that sigh about my door!
Ye mourn the pleasant hours that are no more,
  The tender graces of the vanished spring,
The sultry splendor of long summer days,
  The songs of birds, and streamlets murmuring,
And far hills dimly seen through purple haze.

Still as the shrouded dead the cold earth lies;
Sunless and sullen droop the troubled skies;
  There is no sound within the leafless wood,
No mellow echo on the barren hill;
  Hushed is the piping of the insect brood,
And hushed the gurgle of the meadow-rill.

By rutted lanes the tangled green is gone;
The vine no longer hides the naked stone,
  But with its skeleton black fingers clings,—
Its clustered berries, withered on the stem,
  Held sadly out like humble offerings,
Too poor for any hand to gather them.

On hill-side pastures where the panting sheep
Hid from high noon in piny shadows deep,
  In level lawns with daisies overcast,
The haunts of belted bees and butterflies,
  The sere grass whistles in the cutting blast,
The wrinkled mould in frozen furrows lies.

Now o'er the landscape dreary and forsaken,
Like some thin veil by unseen fingers shaken,
  The snow comes softly hovering through the air,
Flake after flake in crossing threads of white,
  Weaving in misty mazes everywhere,
Till forest, field, and hill are shut from sight.

O sad-voiced winds, that sigh about my door!
I mourn with ye the hours that are no more.
  My heart is weary of the sullen sky,
The leafless branches, and the frozen plain;
  I long to hear the earliest wild-bird's cry
And see the earth in gladsome green again.

NOCTURNE.

Slowly, with grateful calm, the night has come,
And the exultant life which filled the air
With fanning wings and song and sound is dumb;
Each piping pleasurer has found its lair,
And sleep and utter peace reign everywhere.

There is no stir of wind among the leaves,
And not one wrinkle on the darkling stream;
The reeds stand motionless in clustered sheaves,
And through the shades the water-lilies gleam,
Floating, enfolded in a languorous dream.

From many flowers that nestle out of sight
In dewy lawns and dusky thicket-dells,
Commingled odors tremble through the night,
So faint, so subtly sweet, they seem like swells
Of thin ethereal music from their bells.

Sweet is the cool, fresh fragrance of the grass,
The spicy incense of the firs and pines;
And sweet the dead leaves, rustled where I pass,
The humid breath of moss and creeping vines,
And vapory marshes where the fen-fire shines.

Through leaf-fringed oriels rifted in the gloom,
  Glimpses of limpid azure glimmer down,
Serenely clear, and hazed with pearly bloom
  Of clustered stars, like golden grain thick strown,
  And nebulous pale tresses backward blown.

Rapt in the odorous solitude and calm,
  I feel the joy of far primeval nights,
When on his tower the Sabean wrought his charm,
  And shepherd-watchers on Ausonian heights
  Wove legends from the constellated lights.

And some night-lover of a future race,
  Loitering beneath new glooms of branch and bough;
And haply gazing through some verdurous space,
  Shall pause and watch Orion rising slow
  In silent ecstacy—as I do now.

FAME.

I.

"Who built this lofty pile?"
I asked the sullen porter at the gate.
"His was a noble style
And matchless art. What were his name and fate?"
Uprising stiff and slow,
With sharp rheumatic creak and muttering low—
"I never heard his name nor cared to hear,"
He answered grudgingly.
"He has been dead and dust for many a year:
What is the man to me?"

II.

In a forgotten nook,
Flung out of sight to rot in damp and murk,
I found a tattered book.
"Whose was the hand that penned this glorious work?"
I asked my surly guide;
"His deathless fame is sure his nation's pride."
"How should I know," he said with crabbed scorn,
"Some arrant fool or liar!
Give me the trash, 'twill serve some winter morn
To light my kitchen fire."

MUSIC.

I HEAR the ocean's deep vibrating tone
From emerald caverns where sea-fairies dream ;
Or from the sands of southern islands lone,
Where azure veinèd shells and corals gleam :—
Entranced I hear, and ere I am aware,
The green waves sparkle round me everywhere.

I hear a shrill tumultuous glad cry,
The clang of brass and tread of armèd feet,
And round me lances bristle, pennons fly,
And shouting crowds surge through the quaint old street.
Who comes ? What day is this ? What festive town ?
What victory stirs my heart with dead renown ?

The clangor melts to sweetness, and I hear
The sighing sounds of a soft summer night ;
I feel the heart of many a vanished year
Throbbing in mine with anguish and delight ;
I live with Beauty death has made divine,
And lips of storied love are pressed to mine.

I hear the stir of wind among the trees,
The song of birds, the brook's low, reedy croon,
The pipe of grasshoppers, the hum of bees,
Making a murmur in the hot bright noon ;—
I hear and half forget this joyous day
Crowned some fair summer, long since passed away.

A WINTER EVENING.

Like some triumphal Orient pageantry,
  Beheld afar in slow and stately march,
Glittering with gold and crimson blazonry,
  Till lost at length through many a dusky arch,
I saw the day's last clustered spears of light
Enter the clouded portals of the night.

The wind whose brazen clarions had blown
  Imperious fanfarons before the sun
All the brief winter afternoon, died down,
  And in the hush of twilight, one by one,
Like maidens leaning from high balconies,
The early stars looked forth with veilèd eyes.

Then came the moon like a deserted queen
  In blanchèd weed and pensive loveliness;
Not as she rises in midsummer green,
  Hailed by a festal world in gala dress,
With thin sweet incense swung from buds and leaves
And strident minstrelsy of August eves;

But treading in cold calm the frozen plain
With bare white feet and argent torch aloft,
Unheralded through all her drear domain
Save where the cricket sang in sheltered croft,
And faintly heard in fitful monotone,
A solitary owl made shuddering moan.

DOUBT.

If we were called from nothing but to dream
A restless hour of phantom joy and pain ;
If Birth and Life and Death are what they seem—
What sorry jests we are, how poor and vain !
If Being has no more to give.

If we are but the naked brood of Chance,
Bewildered stragglers toward no destined bourn—
Foiled and misled by jeering Circumstance
Till trapped to death, then it were wise to spurn
The worthless heritage of breath.

But if for purpose wiser than we know
The pallid shadow we call Life is given—
If guided on some steadfast way we go
Through storm and darkness toward a quiet haven,
Then it is glorious to live.

If dying is but passage, and the tomb
The solemn portal to sublimer life,
In slumber, sweet as love, borne through the gloom,
We leave behind the sadness and the strife—
Then doubly glorious is death.

FROST.

THE pane is etched with wondrous tracery;
Curve interlaced with curve and line with line,
Like subtle measures of sweet harmony
Transformed to shapes of beauty crystalline.

Slim, graceful vines and tendrils, of such sort
As never grew save in some fairy world,
Wind up from roots of misted silver wrought
Through tulip flowers and lilies half unfurled.

Shag firs and hemlocks blend with plumy palms,
Spiked cacti spring from feathery ferns and weeds,
And sea-blooms, such as rock in Southern calms,
Mingle their foamy fronds with sedge and reeds.

And there are flights of birds with iris wings
That shed in mid-air many a brilliant plume,
And scintillating shoals of swimming things
That seem to float in clear green ocean gloom.

And there are diamond-crusted diadems,
  And orbs of pearl and sceptres of pale gold,
Stored up in crystal grottoes, lit with gems
  And paved with emeralds of price untold.

And marvellous architecture of no name,
  Façades and shafts of loveliest form and hue,
Keen pinnacles and turrets tipped with flame,
  And fretted domes of purest sapphire blue.

All these the genii of the Frost last night
  Wrought through the still cold hours by charm and rune;
And now, like dreams dispelled before the light,
  They float away in vapor on the noon.

LAMENT.

The beauty has not passed away from spring,
Nor the blue splendor from the summer skies;
No note is gone from songs the wild birds sing,
No mellow tone from forest harmonies.
But oh, my heart has lost the sense
Of all their sound and radiance!
I look upon the fields with languid eyes
And find no more the freshness and the charm;
I hear the soft earth-voices murmuring,
But only long for silence and for calm.

KNOWLEDGE.

Take to thyself wings of the speed of light,
And toward the outmost, visible, dim star
That glimmers in the cold abysm of night,
Urge thy immeasurable course afar,
Till thought itself is weary with the flight;
Beyond thee yet unfathomed regions are;
Above, below, the solemn Infinite
Reveals no goal, no barrier, no bar.

So in the shoreless universe of mind,
The Known is but a hint of the Unknown,
A twilight glimpse of glories undefined;
Yet when a hundred centuries have flown,
Thought ever flashing onward unconfined,
The coming men, majestic giants grown,
Shall grope, as we do now, confused and blind,
Upon the borders of a boundless zone.

CARLYLE.

1883.

Iconoclast, thou, too, art overthrown!
Death, merciless as thou, hath torn thee down
From that high place where thou didst sit and frown—
Mocking all human weakness save thine own.
A warrior thou, and yet thou didst not meet
Thy fate with lofty fortitude resigned;
But like a Parthian, direst in defeat,
A flight of poisoned arrows shot behind.
Fame tramples on thy name as thou didst tread
With iron heel upon the illustrious dead.
Ah, well for thee if thou hadst knelt and wept
In manly silence where thy brothers slept!
Thy tears had sweetened all thy bitter leaven,
And for forgiving, thou hadst been forgiven.

Who made thee judge? Hadst thou no weakness, too?
No kindred crumbling of our common clay,
That thou shouldst tear death's kindly veil away
And hold the meaner part of genius up to view?
They called thee Friend, and laid their bosoms bare—
Thou sawest only what what was poorest there;

The rich, the lofty and the sweet, thine eye
Marked not, or marking, passed them sneering by.
Thou hadst too little mercy to be just:
Unkind! at thy command behold them crawl—
Sad, shambling phantoms, shaped of hallowed dust!
Unwise! thy haggard figure heads them all.

Tormented by the vultures of disease,
An egotist of pain, thou sawest men
Through the dark medium of thine agonies;
And in thine own hot gall didst dip thy pen,
And Cowards, Fools and Knaves didst write them down
Life early looked upon thee with a frown,
And thou didst nurse the insult in thy brain,
Till, certain of thy strength, with fierce disdain,
Tenfold thou didst repay thyself again.

And thou wert strong! Magician of the spell
That raised the spectres of the headless dead,
Who rolled in blood beneath a nation's tread,
While Freedom wallowed in her crimson hell!
Ca ira! hark, the tramp of marching feet!
Hark to the tumbrels jolting through the street,
The clashing guillotine that never tires,
Till Terror, strangled with excess, expires!

Such strength was thine. Ah, had there been in thee
More of the gentleness thou didst despise;
Had Man seemed less unlovely in thine eyes,
Thy faults, the heirlooms of mortality,
His loving hands had buried with thy frame;
Sealing unblemished to posterity
The glory of a high and hallowed name.

HERO WORSHIP.

Idols of wood and stone, conquerors and kings—
  Creatures of gilded dust with feet of clay—
See how the nations worship these vain things
  A breath has made, a breath might sweep away!

Puppets, lost in the lustre of a crown,
  Imperial but by irony of birth,
Unworthy heritors of old renown,
  Yet more than gods to half the heedless earth;

Soldiers, who leave posterity a name,
  A statue in the shrine of fear and hate.—
To nobler minds the synonym of shame,
  An effigy to scorn and execrate;

Leaders of State, coiners of ringing phrase,
  Prating of common weal and patriotism,
Insatiate pensioners of public praise,
  Froth on the fickle tide of party schism;

To these the world bows down, the incense fumes;
Fame in her false and florid blazonry,
Inscribes the legends of their deeds and dooms,
And credulous history repeats the lie.

But there are lofty spirits in disguise,
Heroes in common garb, whose meek brows bear
The thorny crown of perfect sacrifice,
Whose simple souls are kingly unaware;

Lives to one sacred mission consecrate
Of duty death alone can swerve them from,
Or love that glorifies their lowly state
Through fiery pangs of lifelong martyrdom.

They tread with us the dusty paths of time,
Or lie in uncommemorative sod,
Unrecognized, unhonored, yet sublime,
Their greatness witnessed only by their God.

DECEMBER—AN ELEGY.

The summer's wreath is withered in the plain,
And Autumn's graver garb of dusky gold
Lies strewn in sombre glen and silent lane,
And winter, like a palmer sable-stoled,
Watches with cold unsympathetic eyes
The dying year's faint, final agonies.

Ay, summer is no more; afar I hear
A heavy sigh and sound among the leaves,
As of the feet of those who bear a bier
With wailing voices; 'tis the wind that grieves,
Seeking through lone, dim vales and woodlands dun
The bright departed children of the sun.

And I, too, seek in places well-remembered,
Some lingering token of the vanished hours,
But round me lie all desolate and dismembered,
The green mid-forest glades and vine-roofed bowers
Where peace like a sweet presence held her sway;
Nothing remains but ruin and decay.

I loiter by the ivy-mantled wall
  Where cling the shattered nests upon the bough,
To hear one faint and farewell echo fall
  Of all the music that is silent now ;
In vain ; the sere grass shivers on the hill,
The rushes moan beside the frozen rill.

I feel like one in lonely age returning
  To seek repose in haunts of happier years,
Who stands and gazes round him, vainly yearning
  For one dear landmark that his memory bears ;
Till from his revery by some rude hand shaken,
He starts and wakes and finds himself forsaken.

SONG.

When all is said and sung, what is the sum?
Love, only love.
What brightest dream hath youth of years to come?
What retrospect turn dim eyes latest from?
Love, only love.

What word sounds sweetest in the poet's rhyme?
Love, only love.
What tales first told in some forgotten clime,
From heart to heart, throb through the lapse of time?
Love, only love.

The guide-star of the soul's divine endeavor,
Love, only love.
The bond of lives which death cannot dissever,
The litany the seraphs sing forever—
Love, only love.

SONG.—LOVE'S LANGUAGE.

Love's pleadings will be heard though lips be still,
  In fluttering breaths that quicken into sighs,
In timid hands that touch and cling and thrill,
  And in the dear confession of the eyes;
Yes, very silence has a voice of prayer
More sweet than any old Provençal air.

As when beside a viol lying mute,
  Strong chords are struck until it seems to wake
And give an answering murmur to the lute,
  So heart will throb to heart for love's sweet sake,
And chant in faint, delicious harmonies
The rapturous passion-song that never dies.

How dim on sculptured shafts remains the trace
  Of stately idioms syllabled no more,
While ever in divine, perennial grace,
  Endures the nameless unrecorded lore,
Whereby in all the ages passed away
Love made its mute petition, as to-day.

THE APPEAL.

Cold, bitter cold beneath the wild March moon,
The winter snow lies on my frozen breast;
And o'er my head the cypress branches croon
A sad and ceaseless dirge, and break my rest.

I hear the bell chime in the dark church tower,
The rising wind, a passer's hasty tread;
But no voice wakes the silence, hour by hour,
Among the uncompanionable dead.

Perchance they lie in deep, unconscious calm,
Regretting nothing in the world above;
Alas! for me, it has not lost its charm;
There is no peace where thou art not, my love.

Oh, bid me come to thee and I will rise
From my unquiet couch and steal to thine,
And touch thy cheek and kiss thy sleeping eyes
And clasp thee as of old, till morning shine!

And I will murmur in thy drowsy ears
Sweet utterances of love and olden song,
Till thou shalt half awake in blissful tears,
And cry "My love, why hast thou staid so long?'

RECOMPENSE.

TO PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

"Oh, smile among the shades for this is fame!"
—*Keats's Sonnet to Burns.*

Only these tears! Not bitter drops like those
Which from thy lacerated heart were shed,
Mixed with the blood of thy Promethean throes;
But those we weep for the belovéd dead,
When time has calmed and purified the pain
And melancholy peace has come again.

Only these tears, for that divinest prize
Which thou with sacrifice sublime didst win;
The angel at the gates of Paradise
Scorches the hearts of those who venture in,
To bring again into the world, a glance
Of its lost happiness and radiance.

Beauty is born with travail; the young Spring
Blooms on the bosom of a Summer dead;
The splendors of the Autumn languishing
Are nature's dying hues of gold and red;

The strife, the sorrow, the neglect, the wrong,
Are changed within the Poet's soul to song.

Oh thou, of dreamers brightest, and of men
  Most gentle and most loving, yet least loved!
Is there no recompense of word or pen,
  No high revenge thou mightest have approved,
For all the scorn, the sorrow and the shame?
Only these tears!—Oh Poet, this is fame!

CONTRASTS.

In this dark dwelling sits the spectre Death,
Watching a still, cold face with stirless eyes ;
Yonder the new-born draws his first sharp breath,
The while the sweet, white mother smiling lies ;
There shine the festal lights, the fleet foot flies
To rythmic measures, while the joyous strain
Throbs with the fever in the sick man's brain.

TO AN EAGLE.

On me the sun has set, the lowlands lie
Dim in the purple folds of early night;
But thou, gray cruiser of the chartless sky!
Dost steer thy slow, undeviating flight
Full in the sun's unclouded glare.
The world is bright around thee, thy strong breast
Parts flashing streams of keen, ethereal fire;
Aslant the ardent splendors of the West,
On still, curved vans thou mountest ever higher,
Through scintillating zones of air.

From what far quest through the white gates of Morn,
Beyond the peopled East, returnest thou?
Toward what sheer, solitary mountain bourn
In the primeval wild, art voyaging now?
Thou haunter of unbarriered space!
I watch thee soaring up the steeps of light,
Half doubting thou art aught of mortal birth,
Foredoomed to hunger, weariness and blight
And wintry change of this controlling earth,
Like our slow-footed, wingless race.

Aloof in lone, aërial equipoise,
  The roar of inextinguishable strife
Melts round thee like a faint, unmeaning voice,
  And to thy sight the myriad maze of life
    Is but a blurred, phantasmal scene.
Away, strong soul! thou leavest Time and Death,
  Dishevelled Grief and hollow-chested Care
To crawl the dim, abysmal world beneath,
  Whilst thou in deeps of golden dusk, dost fare
    Far through the measureless serene.

TOIL.

It is enough ! here will I lay me down ;
Here on the hard earth's breast, where all day long
I labor, I the heir unto a crown,
To whom fair, fruitful fields of right belong,
And easeful hours achieved of no man's wrong.

It is enough ! if toil be life's one law
'Twere wiser then, to break the law and die.
What gain by patience ? bricks without the straw,
An endless tale, until the end draws nigh,
Then like King Harold, seven feet where to lie.

This must be the reasoning of a tramp. It is not sound poetry for it is not sound sentiment. Or is it? The more charitably regarded as an expression of that rebellion against our fate which all experience at times?

SNOW SORCERY.

The spirits of the North were out last night,
Weaving their wizard spells on plain and hill;
The moon arose and set and gave no light,
The river freezing in the reeds grew still;
The shuddering stars were hid behind the cloud,
And all the hollow winds were wailing loud.

Where stood the ricks, three antique temples stand,
Like those whose alabaster domes are seen
In old Benares, or far Samarcand,
Half hid in groves of lime and citron green.
With slender minarets whose crystal spires
Burn in the sun with keen, prismatic fires.

The pine is like a tall cathedral tower,
With oriels of withered ivy-vines
Entwined in sculptured shapes of wreath and flower,
Through which the clear, red stain of morning shines;
And underneath, the snow-draped shrubs and briars
Seem kneeling groups of silent, white-robed friars.

No stone or bush but wears a rare device
  Of graceful semblance or ideal form,
Fair fantasy, or sumptuous edifice;
  As if the wayward Ariels of the storm
Had blent the magic arts of Prospero
With their own whims, and wrought them in the snow.

TO A WANDERING DOG.

WHAT! is it thou that askest entrance there?
Who art thou, friend, and what would'st thou of me?
Food, fire and shelter from the bitter air,
A kindly word, a touch of sympathy?

Methinks misfortune should have made thee wise,
Yet plain it is thou art both dull and blind,
Else never had'st thou dared in such a guise,
Ask boon or grace of one of human kind.

Trust me, good sir, a coat of napless seam,
A timid air, an aspect sad and wan,
Served never yet to win the world's esteem;
The text is true alike for dog and man.

AT DAWN.

A SUDDEN stillness, O, how deep and sweet!
A rich, devotional calm that seems to rise
In dewy fragrance from the earth, to greet
The solemn glory in the eastern skies!

The faint, ethereal harmonies of night,
Tuned to the dreaming ear, have died away;
Nor yet the timid touch of early light
Has waked the stormy discords of the day.

Sleep reigns. The spirit of this holy hour
Soothes all her weary children on her breast,
Man, tossing in his dreams, bird, beast and flower,
She sprinkles with the gracious balm of rest

ICE-BOUND.

Bright in the broad, white moon the river gleams,
  Limpid as if on some still, August night
A sudden frost had stolen upon its dreams
  And crystalized its summer calm and light.

Its voice is hushed, yet when the sprays of snow
  Pluming the ozier sheafs, are shaken out,
I seem to hear the music of its flow,
  And the cood tinkle of the leaping trout.

ILLUSION.

Clouds of Autumn sunset glowing
With ruby, gold and amethyst!
Not less fair to me for knowing
Ye are but shifting shreds of mist!

Moon of Summer, softly streaming
Through my windows silver-clear!
Not less tender is thy seeming,
Though a bleak and lifeless sphere.

Flower that springest like a lover
To kiss the ruddy lips of May!
Though thy bloom will soon be over,
Not less sweet art thou to-day.

Life that art so full of sorrow!
We've laughed together, thou and I,
Not less gayly, though to-morrow
We sigh, clasp hands and bid good-by.

INVOCATION.

TAKE what thou wilt and leave me love, oh Fate!
Take all I have—friends, honor and fair fame,
Turn me to laughter in the eye of hate,
Clothe me with scorn and bind my brow with shame,
Give me for bread the bitter fruit of care,
Give me to drink the poison-wine of pain,
Seal me with sleepless sorrow and despair—
Take all, change all, oh Fate! so love remain.

OVER THE MOUNTAINS.

"What dream unpillowed thy young head
At chill and cheerless break of day?
And where, with swift, impatient tread,
Pursuest thou thy lonely way?"

"See where the purple mountains lie,
Like clouds that catch the rising sun;
Behind yon peak that breasts the sky
I needs must be ere day is done."

"And lies thy home beyond that peak,
In some wild-wooded mountain-glen,
And, sick with absence, dost thou seek
The sweet, familiar scene again?"

"Untroubled as the morning wind
That drinks the dew from grass and tree,
I leave my father's house behind;
The broad, bright world is home to me."

"Then Fancy hath thee by the hand,
And whispers tales of import sweet,
How, sighing through a rainbow land,
Love listens for thy coming feet."

"'Twere sweet to find love waiting me,
If love were meek and came unsought;
Not mine a love-sick fantasy,
I follow a sublimer thought."

"Dost dream of mines and treasures rare,
In yon recesses buried down,
Or seek in faery fastness there
The bitter laurel of renown?"

"Ask me no more! I cannot tell
What thing I burn to find or do;
I only know a wild, wild spell
Compels me to those crests of blue."

"I warn thee, though they seem so near,
It is a weary way between;
Through woods and wastes obscure and drear,
And adder-haunted fens unseen."

"A journey made, a danger met,
Are tales to tell when both are done;
There never was pleasure yet
Worth tasting if too smoothly won."

"Oh, boy, why waste the golden hours
In searching after fancied sweet?
Thou'lt find naught sweeter than the flowers,
That die beneath thy heedless feet."

"Oh, rank of scent and pale to sight
The weeds that haunt this homely place!
The flowers that spring beyond that height
Must bloom with a diviner grace."

"On some tall cliff's accessless crown
They mock the desperate climber's clutch,
Or haply, if he pull them down,
They turn to ashes at his touch.

"Beyond those hills in other years,
I, too, sought wondrous things to find.
Ah me! I turn again, with tears,
To seek the sweets I left behind."

MUTABILITY.

Life is a journey with but little rest,
A cruising bark that anchors nowhere long;
A migratory bird that builds no nest,
Seeking new haunts on pinions swift and strong;
An endless longing and a fruitless quest.

WRONGED LOVE.

Who wrongeth love doth himself grievous wrong;
For he hath shut away the light of heaven
And doomed his darkened soul to wander long
In nether exile, desolate, unforgiven;
Till at God's feet, imploring his release,
Wronged love, all pardoning, shall win his peace.

Thus in her low voice like the silver chime
Of bells heard over distant hills by night,
She read aloud her chosen poet's rhyme—
How two of old found favor in love's sight;
And one was false and one with cureless wound,
Closed his sad eyes in consecrated ground.

RANDOM CHORDS.

A Vista.

The river winding onward till it seems
  To part the dusky hills on either side
And make a highway to the land of dreams ;
  Slim elms whose slender branches arching wide
Enmesh the stars that shimmer through them there,
Like gems that gleam in Berenice's hair !

Dawn Music.

When from her window-bars the maiden Morn,
  Shakes down the star-drops from her shining hair,
Athwart the meadow silences is borne
  A golden hint of music hushed in air :
Is it the winding of Diana's horn ?

Night Silence.

Is it not beautiful, the perfect night?
So still not one leaf's darker side uplifts
Unto the moon; nor where the broken light
In clear-clipped shapes falls through the azure rifts
Upon the dew besilvered sward below,
Stirs one slight stem a moth's frail wing might blow.

Gloaming.

The arching splendor, momently more faint,
Burns round the cold, white crest of yonder height,
As o'er the forehead of a dying saint
'Tis said the halo, glimpse of heaven's own light,
Was seen by those who knelt to gaze and pray.
Lo! gleam by gleam, it fails and fades away.

Pursuit.

Oh! pilgrim night, art thou not weary,
Returning on the self-same way
O'er dusky wold and woodland dreary,
Pursuing still the flying day?

The self-same hill, the self-same meadow,
While seasons wax and seasons wane,
Grow sad beneath thy coming shadow,
Grow glad when thou art gone again.

Winter Beauty.

Silence of snow and gloom of frowning skies,
Splendor of death, or wonder of white sleep,
Cold, stately beauty, perfect marble-wise,
Like as a statue whose still features keep
A spectral semblance with unseeing eyes!

Solitude.

A wild, wind-beaten coast where no man dwells,
And no lone sea-bird builds its mateless nest,
Where ever like the chime of goblin bells
That ring some Runic measure of unrest,
Some weird lament, some wordless litany,
Sounds the unsleeping sea.

A waste of cloven crag and wrinkled sand,
Wave-winnowed miles of grass and sluggish stream,
Where ever through the blown and barren land,
Like vehement, strange voices in a dream
That wail and warn in muffled monotone,
The wind makes desolate moan.

Revisited.

Last night some nameless longing led me thither,
Some memory from the buried years upcast;—
I wandered idly on, I knew not whither,
Lost in the lightless caverns of the past.

Like hooded friars with foreheads bent to pray,
Pacing before some minster's lighted pane,
Gray cloud-shapes swept across the waning day,
With shifting gleams and sudden gusts of rain.

And wailing shrilly like a childless woman,
The bleak wind moaned and clamored fitfully,
And like the stealthy step of nothing human,
The dead leaves softly seemed pursuing me.

RENAISSANCE.

"The loveliness has passed away!" they cry;
"Romance lies dead beside her broken lyre;
Beauty has vanished from the earth and sky,
The dawn is cold, the noon has lost its fire."
But to the blind what are the hues of Spring?
And to the deaf what songs does Summer sing?

Nothing has passed away that once was fair;
The day wanes through the golden gates of even;
The leaves have voices in the quiet air;
The stars burn bright upon the brow of heaven;
The woods are loud with notes as rich and clear
As ever charmed Arcadian shepherd's ear.

No, Beauty is not lost; and those who will
May find her sleeping in a wayside flower,
Or throned upon some solitary hill,
Robed in the symbols of her ancient power.
But reverent pilgrims throng her shrines no more;
Her faithless priesthood have forgot her lore.

Our lines are cast upon a barren time;
  Cold doubt congeals the fervid heart of youth;
The greed of gain and power demeans our prime;
  And love of self usurps the love of truth.
Faint are the sounds of song; the poet's lay
Is still the music of his race and day.

But 'neath December's frozen meadows lie
  The folded splendors of the unborn May.
The germ of beauty that can never die
  May slumber while the cold years lapse away;
But, soon or late, within the common heart,
Shall wake to purer faith and loftier art.

SONG.

How many lips have uttered one sweet word—
  Ever the sweetest word in any tongue!
How many listening hearts have wildly stirred,
  While burning blushes to the soft cheeks sprung,
And dear eyes, deepening with a light divine,
Were lifted up, as thine are now to mine!

How oft the night, with silence and perfume,
  Has hushed the world that heart might speak to heart,
And make in each dim haunt of leafy gloom
  A trysting place where love might meet and part,
And kisses fall unseen on lips and brow,
As on thine, sweet! my kisses linger now!

LOVE'S DWELLING-PLACE.

WHERE dwelleth Love? oh, tell me where!
In some dim region of delight,
Beyond the dayspring's golden bars,
Above the uttermost bright stars,
Far in the azure Infinite?
Oh, no! not there.

Is it in lands the poets know,
Where lovely shapes go up and down
Through vaulted glooms and flickering gleams,
In the pale, pictured hall of dreams,
To fairy music, faintly blown?
Oh, no! not so.

Dwelt she in happy Arcady,
With the Saturnian race of men,
Ere yet with wisdom, war and gold,
The human heart grew sad and cold,
Then fled she back to heaven again?
Not fled is she.

Or sole in Languedoc the fair,
In brave, bright days of chivalry,
When good knights fought on field and tower,
And troubadours, in court and bower,
Sang lays of Belle Dame Sans Merci?
Not only there.

Or slumbers she in palmy dells
Of some lone, undiscovered isle,
With folded hands and lidded eyes,
Beneath dusk, leaf-woven canopies
That shed soft dew of sound the while?
Not there she dwells.

Ah, no! hers is no hidden shrine;
She bides in ways of stress and strife;
Her lips are on the brow of pain,
Her strong hand lightens labor's chain,
She makes of this hard, bitter life
A thing divine.

The wrongs of change, the wounds of time,
The world's disdain, she will endure;
She is not bribed by gold or fame,

Nor daunted by the taint of shame ;
Whate'er betide she standeth sure,
With trust sublime.

She comes in various disguise
Of rustic garb or royal grace,
But whatso be her name or state,
Thy heart will know her, soon or late,
When she unveils her splendid face
And glowing eyes.

IN CAPTIVITY.

Upon a naked islet in the sea—
To me a shoreless sea—
I stand and watch the waves roll on the sands,
For some chance waif adrift from other lands
Below the sloping sky.

The jealous sea derides me with its voice—
Its secret, sneering voice;
In vain I seek along the barren shore
The frailest boat, or plank, or splintered oar,
To brave its tyrant might.

Fast on this little birthright of my race—
Ah me! a short-lived race!
Is it decreed that I shall never see
What lies beyond my narrow boundary,
Before God bids me die?

The day holds fast its secret from my quest—
My restless, burning quest;
The dusk, mysterious dawn broods on the sea;
The sun wheels up in flaming majesty,
And blinds my shrinking sight.

With gaze upstrained I haunt the depth of stars—
The mute, impassive stars;
And like a hot young neophyte, I try
To penetrate with my bewildered eye
The Isis veil of night.

Lost and amazed, in deepest gloom I grope—
With outstretched hands I grope—
Around the circle of a single day;
The infinite of years yawns in my way,
And swallows up my cry.

AT THE MERMAID INN.

AFTER THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF "HAMLET."

At table, yonder, sits the man we seek,
  Beside the ingle, where the crimson flare
Reveals him through the eddying tavern reek,
  Reclining easeful in his leathern chair;
In russet doublet, bearded and benign,
He looks a worthy burgher at his wine.

Even so; but when thy veins ran fire to-night,
  Thy hand crept knotted to thy sword-hilt there,
And through all moods of madness and delight
  Thy soul was hurried headlong, unaware,
It seemed the genius of the scene should be
Some radiant shape, brow-bound with majesty.

And lo! a man unsingled from the crowd
  By quick recognizance of reverent eyes,
A dim, inobvious presence, kindly-browed,
  That sits apart, observant, thoughtful-wise,
Weaving—who knows?—what wondrous woof of song,
What other Hamlet, from the shifting throng.

A pale, plain-favored face, the smile whereof
Is beautiful; the eyes gray, changeful, bright,
Low-lidded now, and luminous as love;
Anon soul-searching, ominous as night,
Seer-like, inscrutable, revealing deeps
Wherein a mighty spirit wakes or sleeps.

Here, where my outstretched hand might touch his arm,
I gaze upon that mild and lofty mien,
With that deep awe and unexpressive charm
I feel in wide sea-solitudes serene;
Or on some immemorial mountain's crest—
Eternity unveiled and manifest.

For he hath wrought with nature and made known
The marvel and the majesty of life;
Translating from the pages of his own
The mighty heart of man, the stress and strife,
The pain, the passion, and the bitter leaven,
The cares that quell, the dreams that soar to heaven.

So, whatsoever time shall make or mar,
Or fate decree of benison or blame,
This poet-player, like a wondrous star,
Shall shed the solemn splendor of his fame,
Wide as the world, while beauty has a shrine,
While youth has hope, and love is yet divine.

THE SONG OF THE SCYTHE.

Amid the August noontide white and warm,
A rythmic sound, sweet as a distant chime,
Floats from the meadows steeped in sultry calm,
Blent with the breath of clover-bloom and thyme;
As if the scent of leaf and flower might be
An undertone of dreamy melody.

Like tuneful voices in a tongue unknown,
Chanting some old Saturnian harmony,
Or Pan-pipes in dark forest coverts blown,
To tempt the timid Dryad from her tree,
The golden, molten measures throb and flow
Where sunburned reapers swing the scythe arow.

Sweet pastoral, that with a single note
Hymneth the primal poetry of earth!
Thine are the songs of summer days remote,
Old harvest-homes and boisterous village mirth,
The country dance upon the threshing-floor,
The light kiss stolen from lips that laugh no more.

And lo! yon priests of Ceres crowned with wheat,
Brown, lusty youths that draw the laden wain,
Fair girls with gleaming limbs and naked feet,
And all the tumult of the joyous train!
And lo! where in the beechen shadows deep,
Sweet Amaryllis sits among her sheep!

JUNE DAYS.

Wane on, delicious days of shower and shine,
  Cool, cloudy morns, and noontides white and warm,
And eves that melt in azure hyaline—
  Wane to midsummer's long, Lethean calm!

For all the woods are shrill with stress of song,
  Where soft wings flutter down to new-built nests,
And turbulent sweet sounds are heard day-long,
  As of innumerable marriage-feasts.

The flame of flowers is bright along the plain,
  The hills are dim beneath pale, brooding skies;
And, like a kiss that thrills through every vein,
  The warm wind, odor-laden, stirs and sighs,

Murmuring like music heard afar by night,
  From boats becalmed on star-illumined streams;
Sad as the memory of a lost delight,
  Sweet as the voices that are heard in dreams.

Wane, siren days, and break the spell that wrings
The burdened breast with undefined regret,
Wayward desires, and vain imaginings,
The nameless longing, and the idle fret.

Wane on! ye wake the love that tempts and flies;
And where love is, thence peace departs full soon;
But, ah, how sweet love is, e'en though it dies
With thy last roses, O enchantress June!

MEMORY.

WHAT we miscall our life is Memory :
We walk upon a narrow path between
Two gulfs—what is to be, and what has been,
Led by a guide whose name is Destiny ;
Beyond is sightless gloom and mystery,
From whose unfathomable depths we glean
Chaotic hopes and terrors, dimly seen
Reflections of a past reality.
Behind, pursuing through the twilight haze,
The phantom people of the past appear;
Hope, happiness and sorrow, fruitless strife,
And all the loved and lost of other days ;
They crowd upon us closer year by year,
Till we as phantoms haunt some other life.

TO A BUTTERFLY.

Through August shine and shadow softly borne,
Silent in curves of slow, uncertain flight,
Far o'er the meadows and the ripening corn,
Thou dippest down through shimmering waves of light
To flowery islands odorous and bright.

No woven fabric ever caught such dyes,
No rare, embroidered cymar, half unrolled
To tempt a Turkish favorite's sated eyes,
With fitful splendors in each luminous fold
Of lucid sapphire, pearl and frosted gold.

Thou knowest not of cold and cloudy skies
The naked hedge, the sere and sighing wood ;
Thou livest not on while all around thee dies,
The last, faint loiterer of thy bright brood
Forgotten in some icy solitude.

Bright child of summer! who has seen in thee
The mournful type of Beauty's swift decay?
Rather the happy symbol shouldst thou be
Of life that fills a full and joyous day,
Then, ere the winter chills it, fades away.

AT SUNRISE.

It is the last dark hour, and from their cars,
That wheel them down through glimmering voids of light,
Leaning reluctantly, the hearkening stars
Hear the faint, final music of the night
Blend with the far, sweet voice of coming day,
And with the moon, low riding, wane away.

Like some soft-footed maiden, bearing high
A silver lamp above her timorous head,
The dawn mounts up the stairways of the sky,
Flushing the ashen east with lambent red,
Till from her topmost tower she looketh down,
Smiling through cloudy tresses wildly blown.

The world awakens; hark, from glen and copse,
Music and many voices of delight!
The splendor on the purple mountain tops
Descends, and all the summer plains are bright;
And all the luminous, pure sky above
Is calm and tender as the smile of love.

ITALIAN DREAMS.

O Italy! thou givest me no rest,
  But ever, like the thoughts of absent love,
Thou stirrest a burning fever in my breast,
  A mad desire to see thee and to prove
Thou art more fair than my resplendent dream;
  For well I wot this cold, ungracious clime
  Has neither old romance, nor scene, nor time
Whereby to picture forth how thou dost seem.

Not that I love my native land the less;
  She is my mother, passionless but kind;
And, mayhap, sick with alien loneliness,
  I might turn looks of tenderness behind,
And yearn once more to see her cold blue skies,
  Her solemn hills, uncastled and unsung;
  To hear again the tuneless Saxon tongue,
And reunite too rudely severed ties.

But Italy ! across the pathless sea,
  O'er whose waste wistfully I gaze afar,
I hear thy voice forever calling me,
  As love's voice calls beneath the evening star ;
I hear from dim, old spires the vesper bell,
  The plash of tideless waves on Baiæ's shore,
  And from the Arno, darkness brooding o'er,
The strains of some impassioned ritornelle.

Young Keats, asleep beside the Roman wall !
  I deem not thine a destiny for tears ;
To tread the holy ground where thou didst fall,
  I too would turn the brief page of my years.
And Shelley, no regret have I for thee !
  Thy heart lies in the silent Cistian grove
  And mingles with the soil which thou didst love,
Where my heart is, though I may never be.

THE FLOWER OF LOVE.

O pluck the blossom in its crimson prime,
Ere yet one tender hue has passed away!
So shall it never know the winter time,
Sere blight of frost, or livid, slow decay.
While now thou fold'st me to thy fluttering breast,
In the sweet tremor of thy love and shame,
And like a stock-dove cooing on its nest,
Thou murmurest low the accents of my name;
While now the sense of laboring time is gone—
Swooned in the sea, lost, buried anywhere—
While all I heed of heaven or world alone,
Lies in thine arms, pavilioned by thy hair,
O would that thou couldst kiss away my breath,
And love sink down deliciously to death.

TRUTH.

"Nothing is more wretched than a man who traverses everything in a round and pries into the things beneath the earth."—*Marcus Antonius, quoted from Pindar.*

The world is beautiful and all the brood
It nurses on its mother-breast, of things
That move and know and forms that seem to be
But for the sake of loveliness alone.
Than this, what deeper knowledge need there be
To round the sum of all-desired content?

O hapless he, who seeks by devious ways,
In mines and deep-sea caverns, and the vault
Where swing those pendulums of Time, the stars,
Or in the corridors of his own brain,
The ultimate and perfect truth, which found
Might prove the secret of pure happiness!
He is a snail that crawls a summer day
Beside a brook, where every leaf and stone
Is but a bar to his obscure advance.
His eyes and thoughts take note of littleness;
And not for him the glory of the sky,
Where burns the sun, nor the near perfect scene
Of woods and streams and hills that spreads around.

Once I had zeal to learn the ways of God;
O I did yearn to read, with these dim eyes,
The dark and incommunicative past,
On stony pages of the underworld,
Or in the wheeling maze of distant spheres;
And to forecast the destined path which I
And all my momentary kind should tread!
Some gleams misled me; I did hope to hold
Within the compass of my little brain,
The scope and bulk of all eternity.
And as I walked the darkness grew apace,
And all things looming out of shadow, seemed
The monstrous part of some more monstrous whole.
And then came madness—madness of despair;
I lifted up my hands and cried aloud,
"Lo! this is all! there is no truth but this!"
And pausing there, I sat me down and wept.

Then death became a horror and a crime,
And life the infinite of nothingness;
And all the ills of life the torture play,
Remorseless, of sarcastic destiny;
While thus I sat in bitterness profound,
Lo! through the midnight gloom above my head

A single star shone out, a small clear light
That tranced my dreary gaze and held it fast,
Till in my soul, I knew not why, nor know,
As on its beam a still, sweet ray of peace
Was born, and lighting all my inner night,
Did banish my despair with rich content.
Then back I fared. till on the noonday walk
Of common life I viewed the outer world
With clearer eyes that saw and loved it all.

And now the sweet uprising of the dawn,
The mellow noon with all its insect joy,
The blossom-tinted sunset and the night
With its mysterious ecstacy of stars;
The clouds, the storms and winter's darkest frown,
The hills and hollow places and the streams,
The face of man, these seem the perfect truth—
These do I deem the all-sufficient cause—
If cause need be—and the accomplished end.

THE HEIR.

The world awaits : When shall there come again
The nameless heir to an imperial throne,
From thronged metropolis or mountain glen,
To prove his royal blood and claim his own—
The boundless empire of the hearts of men ?
Is he among us now, uncrowned, unknown,—
Perchance his birth-right self-unrecognized—
A king beneath a peasant's garb disguised?

Doubt not ; for while the fair young mother Spring
Comes lapping in her robe half-opened flowers,
And birds that seek old haunts on eager wing ;
While buxom Summer dozes through bright hours,
Unwaked by insect pipe or scythe's far ring ;
While auburn Autumn browns the forest bowers,
And Winter bellows o'er the wind-swept hill,
One favored son is born to Nature still.

The crown is his whose life is set apart,
  Not by strange moods or cloudy wanderings,
But by the clear faith of a fervent heart,
  To pierce the clotted crust of common things.
And with the passion of an untaught art—
  As some joy-raptured bird leaps up and sings—
Translate in music to the voiceless throng
The loveliness which has no name but Song.

FIRESIDE SONG.

Draw close the curtain on the streaming pane!
Our hearts are heavy with the cheerless night;
Shut out the tumult of the wind and rain,
Shut out the cold and dark, shut in the light!

See, love, the gracious glow on wall and floor!
Here, at the noon-mark of these golden gleams,
We may forget the winter out of door,
And lose ourselves in pleasant summer dreams.

Here, islanded in calm, we may forget
The outer life of stormy cares and aims;
And all that makes its struggle and regret
May be to us no more than empty names.

Shut out the bleak world and the troubled sky!
Shut in our love, our loneliness and peace!
Though winter storms be out and winds be high,
The summer in our hearts need never cease.

THE FACE OF LOVE.

But once beheld by any man, no more;
And then with such wild tumult in his brain
He may not recollect the look it wore,
Or if 'twas pleasure that he felt, or pain,
When those strange eyes sent fire to his heart's core.

But who can grasp the maze of sad delight
That music weaves, its memory dying never?
And who can read the Face of Love aright,
With all its mystic meanings, shifting ever,
That stir life's deepest springs, yet cheat the sight?

A face of godlike glory, such as men
Might well misdeem the majesty of heaven,
But that there ever comes and goes again—
Like clouds across the noonday brilliance driven—
A mien that makes it wholly human then.

Full-lipped as Orient maidens, there may play
The dimpled meaning that has shaken thrones
And swept a nation's boundaries away ;
And then a quiver, as of voiceless groans,
And all the face looks tragic, old and gray.

At times a sad, mysterious face, that seems
With startled eyes to watch for coming ill ;
Yet ever and anon across it gleams
A smile, that, passing, leaves it cold and still,
Enwrapped in unimaginable dreams.

PERENNIAL BEAUTY.

Ever the spring returns with skies serene,
And balmy breath of infant buds and flowers;
Ever the hills renew their primal green,
And melodies that gladdened earth's first hours
And heard again in many a hazel screen.

Warm hearts turn cold, quick pulses cease to beat,
And love grows languid in the lapse of time;
But beauty still tempts youth's pursuing feet,
Bright eyes are endless themes for passioned rhyme,
And lovers' vows will be forever sweet.

Great souls have died for truth and left their fame
To be the watchword of another age;
But virtue, justice, courage, and high aim
Descend through time, a common heritage,
And heroes live to-day in all but name.

Years wax and wane, the good and true remain;
How sweet love is mine own heart telleth me.
Mine eyes have seen the summer in the plain,
And in the crowded street, unwittingly,
I may have passed a martyr in his pain.

THE SISTERS.

"O Life! hast thou misled me with thy smiles?"
I said, "Are all thy gifts so vain—
Mirages of the fabled Happy Isles,
Hung over wide, bleak seas of pain?
Unfathomable Doom! if in thy deeps,
Some compensating secret sleeps,
Oh, let it not be wholly lost;
Give me to see and know thine uttermost!"

Then came two Spirits, like in form and face—
So very like that one might seem
The younger sister with a fresher grace,
And eyes of brighter hue and gleam;
And one with matron movement, grave and slow,
Pale, beautiful, unsmiling brow,
And lips that trembled half apart,
As if with still, sad tenderness of heart.

"Mysterious Sisters, who are ye?" I cried.
"Ye came responsive to no call!"

"Know'st thou not me?" the elder one replied;
"My name is Death, the all-in-all.
I am the uttermost, the solace sweet
For aching hearts and weary feet;
Come thou to me, upon this breast,
Belovèd, find life's golden secret, Rest!"

"Not so," the other cried, "oh, stay awhile!
It was on me that thou didst call;
Thou has not seen the splendor of my smile,
Nor known that Love is all in all.
I am the uttermost, in my clear eyes
The compensating secret lies;
Belovèd, press thy lips to mine
And thou hast made life's crowning glory thine."

Then bending her deep, tender eyes on me,
With more of love than Love's own smile,
Death spake: "Farewell! I came for love of thee,
But thou may'st wait my kiss awhile;
O favored one! the uttermost is thine—
'Tis Love, immortal and divine.
For when I claim thee, thou shalt prove
That Death is but a sweeter name for Love."

THE HOLY HOUR.

Faintly as fades the smile from sleeping lips,
The last of day wanes in the quiet West;
And from the blue above me darkness dips,
Like some wing-weary bird above its nest.

Dim as a warrior's tarnished shield, the moon
Rests on the dusky borders of the sea—
Whose deep voice, like some weird old prophet's rune,
Through the still air is borne afar to me.

The low of herds is hushed upon the hill,
The mill has ceased to murmur by the stream;
In yellow fields the clanging scythe is still,
And all the darkling world is in a dream.

One after one, among the stirless trees,
The lights come out along the village streets,
And many a pleasant glimpse of household ease
Lends night, with all its stars, a charm more sweet.

And hark! where in the gloom, the time-worn tower
  Looms gaunt and ghost-like from the cypress grove,
How tenderly the church-clock tolls the hour—
  The holy hour of perfect peace and love!

Sweet hour! from whose cool, crystal urns of air
  The soothing draught to fevered care is given,
Whose starry silence, like a wordless prayer,
  Uplifts the dark world to the gates of heaven.

LOVE'S FAITH.

I.

Love can wait!
Being so patient it is strong;
If in this world it wait in vain,
It surely shall not suffer long;
For in some other state,
Some life of larger scope,
It ultimately shall attain
The full fruition of its hope.
This is love's faith; defying fate,
Time, change, neglect and laughter,
It can wait
For the Hereafter.

II.

Say that this life is all we know,
And death has nothing to bestow,
Beyond the grave's duress,
But silence and forgetfulness;
Then if I count the cost,
Seeing love's self is sacrifice—
I surely have not lost,
If with this life love dies.

III.

But love's desire,
Being so patient and so sure,
Though it may pass through tears and fire,
Ay, through the portals of the tomb—
Will yet endure,
Till its own time shall come;
Therefore, though never while we live,
It may be mine to ask or yours to give—
Though you may pass beyond my ken,
And I be lost
Among the crowd of nameless men—
Though both be tempest tost
To earth's extremest ends afar,
I know that we shall meet again,
Meet and be one in perfect love.
But when and where—
Whether in this earth here, or heaven above,
Or in some unimagined world or star,
I neither know nor care;
Early or late,
Love can wait.

AMONG THE MOUNTAINS.

Ye lone, majestic Silences that keep
The hoary secrets of primeval time!
Titans, that with dark frontlets ponder deep
On unconjectured mysteries sublime,
Like minds of lofty mould that stand alone,
Wrapped in a wilderness of mighty thought—
The shadow of your solemn power is thrown
Over the world below and it has caught
An awèd quiet, sombre yet serene,
A grave repose, a cold, autumnal gleam;
While past your firm feet, shod in russet green,
With joyous murmur flows the broad, bright stream,
As light and song and laughter might illume
Some old cathedral's immemorial gloom.

EARTH-BOUND.

Sole watcher in the solemn shrine of night,
While in primeval innocence of sleep
The world lies hushed, with folded sense and sight,
And wind and wave their wards of silence keep;
I stand beneath the splendor of the stars
That crowd the illimitable courts above,
Like one who dreams behind his prison bars
Of dim, delicious scenes of peace and love.

The links of care that fetter my worn feet,
The load of life, the tyranny of time,
The vain desire, the sorrow, the defeat,
Have fallen from me as in a trance sublime;
And to my raptured spirit, winged with light,
The power of my exultant wish seems given
To rise beyond the shadowy realms of night,
And pierce the radiant mysteries of heaven.

Vain thought! afar, where in the dusky plain
The hamlet clusters round the ivied tower,
I hear an infant's fitful wail of pain,
And slow and deep the church-clock toll the hour;
And from the cold abstraction of the stars,
Those voices summon me to earth again,
Bid me reclasp my chain upon my scars
And lay me down among my fellow men.

Aye, vain the restless yearning and the dreams,
Vain the rebellion and divine despair!
Drawn ever toward those beautiful faint gleams,
Which are the glimpses of some state more fair,
The baffled spirit still returns to earth;
For brighter are the splendor of Love's eyes,
And the dull embers on the lowly hearth,
Than all the silent glory of the skies.

THE IRONY OF TIME.

If we could resurrect the years again,
When life is on the wane;
If we could learn by many a bitter truth
The value of our youth,
Ere the inexorable hand of Time
Has harvested our prime—
How we should drain from every flower we meet
The last drop of its sweet!
We scorn the present hour, and strive to borrow
Some foretaste of the morrow;
The morrow has its morrow and the pain
Of hope deferred again;
So waste the years, till Age defeated stands,
Desolate, with empty hands.

Pilgrims on paths our fathers trod before,
We trace their footsteps o'er;
On every height, in every vale we meet
Signs of their toiling feet

Gashed on the rock and wounded by the thorn,
Where we are stung and torn.
What was it that they sought? O burning eyes,
Fixed on low western skies!
The beckoning shapes that seem so fair to you
Wear the same dazzling hue
That lured the Vikings through tempestuous seas,
Beyond the Hebrides,
Toward purple isles of peace and golden lands,—
To die on freezing strands.

Time has no precious treasure stored away
Beyond our grasp to-day;
Earth has no secret garden of delight
Hid from our aching sight.
Too late we learn the humble highway flower
Is life's best gift and dower;
The light that kindles in meek, maiden eyes
Is love's divinest guise;
Too late, too late we find there is no more,
On any sea or shore,
Than those rich offerings we have overthrown,
Pursuing the unknown;
Nor any road by which we can attain
Youth's vanished grace again.

THE PARTING OF SUMMER.

Like one who lingers yet upon the sands,
Gazing his last upon the fading sail
That bears his friends afar to other lands,
I watch the bleak November daylight fail,
And, weltering in the pale and watery skies,
The dim stars falter forth, the cold moon rise.

I feel the silence on the hill and plain,
Like that chill hush which haunts an empty room
When, late deserted by a joyous train,
The lights die slowly down and all is gloom;
The cricket shrilling in the darkling wood
Adds but a drearier sense of solitude.

The last frail blossom of the year is dead,
Scentless and sere, beside the frozen rill;
The last of summer's melodists are fled,
Their nests are tenantless, their songs are still,
And, like the echo of a faint farewell,
I hear the shuddering night-wind sink and swell.

METEMPSYCHOSIS.

Love, tell me in what other clime
We met and loved and passed away ;
For surely in the olden time
We kissed as we have kissed to-day.

I have dim memories of a night—
A night all summer perfume, when
We passed an hour of pure delight
And parting, meant to meet again.

'Twas in a rude and warlike age
Of lance and helm and steel-mailed glove,
When more with joy than martial rage,
Men died to win a lady's love.

I loved thee then, not less than now ;
We meet to-day as then we met ;
The same sweet light on lip and brow—
The look of love, is lingering yet.

We've slept since then, profound and sweet,
The dreamless slumber of decay;
Nor marked how time with tireless feet
Bore years and centuries away.

And while we slept the sword and pen
Upturned the feudal world above,
Changed customs, changed the race of men,
Changed all, except ourselves and love.

But of this change we heeded nought
Save of a yearning, vague, profound;
And restless through the world we sought
Until each other's arms we found.

And ere long we shall part, to take
Our rest with death and silence. When
After dim centuries we wake,
Doubt not we meet and love again.

DUET.

HE.

Nay, hold me not—I must be going;
Unwind thine arms and set me free!
The moments fly—I must be doing
Braver deeds than kissing thee.

SHE.

Have then thy will—I would not bind thee,
Though it were death to set thee free.
Ah me! dost think that thou wilt find thee
A sweeter fate than kissing me?

INSINCERITY.

Faint in the face of some controlling fear—
A tyrant shadow with cold, sneering eyes,
Which at an honest laugh would disappear—
We clothe ourselves in plausible disguise
And wrong our nature with laborious lies.

Fear of the scorn which rightly understood,
Is honor paid to genius unaware;
Fear of the venomed fangs of that vile brood
Who fawn on Fortune while the skies are fair,
And bark about the footsteps of Despair:

Fear to be loyal to ourselves through all,
Unshaken, unashamed in all men's sight;
Fear like the Apostle's in the High Priest's hall,
Who, shrinking from the martyr's glorious right,
Disowned the Master and forswore him quite:

Fear to be merely human, simply *man*—
  Richer than kings in that plain dignity—
Grandly imperfect, after God's own plan;
  Finding in our own faults full charity
  And general pardon for humanity.

Ah, no, we lack the courage to be real;
  Each in his various folly toils and tries
To mould his nature to some false ideal,
  And walks a-tiptoe to increase his size,
  Decked out in borrowed plumage, jackdaw-wise.

Who dare say: I have neither gold nor lands,
  High heritage of ancient blood or name;
Labor hath set its seal upon my hands;
  Son of the sons of toil unknown to fame
  I am, and thereunto I take no shame?

Who dare say to the world's conflicting creeds:
  Solace I sought in ye and was denied;
I leaned on ye and found ye hollow reeds;
  Old, dying dungeoners of truth! ye hide
  The face of God with dust of human pride?

Alas how few ! yet dared we rise above
The common curse of insincerity,
Frank, just and fearless, strong in truth and love,
A law unto ourselves, that were to be
First of the sons of time, wise, great and free.

BITTER-SWEET.

My heart has made a slave of me
By love's device and friendship's smile ;
I doubt the day, I dread the night,
I quake at every sound and sight—
So lost am I—ah, woe the while !
I pine not for my liberty.

Through frost and heat, through damp and dust,
I tread one steep and stony course ;
Or if I turn and ease my load
To pluck some blossom by the road,
Swift fall the lashes of remorse ;
My heart permits no lapse of trust.

My heart has lotted me to bear
The weight of many destinies ;
Fast-linked to other lives, I feel
The pulses of their woe and weal,
And countless watchful sympathies
Make my existence one long care.

O nights of cold, prophetic fears!
O days of ripened misery!
Your bitterness I have not known
For pangs or perils of my own;
My heart has laid your load on me,
And love has cankered all my years.

Yet fortune has no gift for me
That I would barter for these pains;
I claim no ease, I ask no rest,
But count myself supremely blest
If I may pass my days in chains,
And die in this dear slavery.

THE ELDORADO.

TIME was when tales of gold lands in the West,
And fountains quelling death forevermore,
Launched Hope's frail shallop on an idle quest
Through strange seas toward this bleak, unbeaconed shore.

The charm has fled before the living stream
That floods each erewhile trackless hill and plain;
Yet since the heart of man must have its dream,
We turn our eyes upon the east again.

There lies the Eldorado—storied land
Of gold-domed cities gleaming from afar;
There Founts of Youth gush from the jewelled sand,
And Song woos Love beneath the evening star.

O wondrous world that I have never seen!
And deem too sadly I shall never see—
My life one long impassioned wish has been
To press thy sacred shores with reverent knee!

O Rome! to thread thy dim old ways and stand
Where stood the mighty ones of other days,
With palace, temple, forum on each hand,
And fill my soul with one long, thirsty gaze!

To be within the Coliseum's wall,
A still hour when the moon's autumnal beams
Through crumbled arch and rift of ruin fall,
Forgetting my poor self in solemn dreams!

Then would I resurrect the buried years;
The splendid past should walk before my gaze;
The mighty dead should murmur in my ears,
And I should be a Roman of old days.

"Look thou on queenly Naples and then die!"
I deem it not so dear a price to pay,
If with such beauty in the heart and eye,
I look my last on earth and swoon away.

Would that such fate were mine! Yet know I not
If ever human heart drew happiness
From hope fulfilled. Is it a fairer lot
To long eternally and not possess?

THE KING.

An ermined spectre on a shaking throne,
That sits with stony eyes, unmoved and cold,
While round about the people curse and groan ;
An old, wan, withered shape, brow-bound with gold—
Long live the king !

Dark relic of the blind, benighted years,
Last of a race defiled by shame and crime
And stained with centuries of blood and tears,
Abhorrèd in the searching eye of time.—
Long live the king !

Thine is the bitter heritage of hate ;
Thy fathers' heavy deeds are on thy head ;
They load thee down as with a leaden weight,
They cry upon thee from the nameless dead.
Long live the king !

They haunt thy fevered couch in haggard dreams,
They mock thy greatness with a secret fear ;
They write upon the wall in fiery gleams—
"Belshazzar, thou art weighed, thy doom is near!"
Long live the king!

In thee the long, ancestral sin shall cease ;
What place hast thou among the sons of men?
Pass on and give the warring nations peace ;
The like of thee shall not be seen again.
Long live the king!

Pass on, thou ancient, immemorial lie!
Thy power is broken in thy feeble hands ;
Behold! the long night lifts along the sky,
The new day rises fair in many lands.
Long live the king!

And lo! with clash of brass and clang of drums,
And thunder of the world's advancing tread,
The heir of time, thy strong successor comes
To pluck the crown from thy dishonored head.
Long live the king!

Man! meant of God to be sole king of men,
Whose birthright is the broad, unbarriered earth,
Whose chariot is the plough, whose sword the pen,
Whose crown the majesty of truth and worth.
Long live the king!

Ay, man! born thrall to gold and place and pride,
Back-bent with burdens, beaten with sharp rods,
Self-sold to vice and fear, creed-crucified,
Patient of power and prostrate to false gods—
Long live the king!

Rerisen from world-old darkness and despair,
Fire-purified, baptized in agony;
Behold! this is indeed the king and heir,
Wise, great and good, well worthy to be free!
Long live the king!

CLOUDLAND.

Somewhere, the legends say, there lies a land
  Older than silent Egypt, whose dim coast
No human foot has trod, no eye has scanned;
  Where never mariner was tempest-tossed,
Nor pilgrim fared along the lonely strand;

And where in brimming cisterns hyaline,
  Flashes the Fountain of Eternal Youth,
Whereof who drinks shall know not any sign
  Of fading cheek or palsy-parchèd mouth,
Or age's long, slow languor and decline.

Some say beyond the sunset's latest ray,
  Far down the ocean's azure brink it lies;
And ofttimes I have seen, at close of day,
  Strange semblances reflected in the skies,
In cloudy pageant soon dissolved away—

Domes, temples, palaces, and misty gleams
Of shapes disclosed behind thin purple veils,
Vistas of hills and plains and winding streams,
Dusk forest solitudes and pastoral dales;
Sweet haunts of quietness and pleasant dreams.

Surely the old belief was not all vain!
There must be ultimate, divine repose,
And love that dieth not and end of pain;
But none have found beyond the twilight's close
The hidden highway to that dim domain.

Yet the relentless turmoil and unrest,
The inborn, feverous craving and the strife,
The wingèd spirit, prisoned and oppressed,
Urge us still onward toward the ideal life,—
Onward forever in untiring quest.

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